

Contrastive Sociolinguistics

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Sociolinguistic characters: On comparing linguistic minorities

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1. Preliminaries

Linguistic minorities can be understood as complex interactional networks. These networks are marked by the use of linguistic forms different from the ones used by the surrounding society, and they are defined in relation to it. This surrounding society itself is to be perceived as a majority type of organization when compared with the focused minoritarian group.

When comparing such complex interactional networks, which we call linguistic minorities, one has to get hold of the salient features of such a situation. This is not an easy task, because at first sight you only get differences: every minority is a special case. Of course it is not that way. Salient features of a situation can be described as specific entries into a paradigm of variables which are characteristic for a set of multilingual communities. A set of comparable social entities is put together by a shared historical and social experience which in turn leads to comparable attitudes concerning one's own place in the majority-minority constellation. Linguistic minorities in Western and Middle Europe have experienced the appearance of the nation state as the normal case of political organization as well as the development of liberal-democratic means of decision finding. These experiences lead to a specific way of dealing with the minority problems and to specific attitudes toward them.

Though rooted in the European experience this type of discourse has obviously had consequences for analogous situations in other parts of the world. But these analogies only refer to the objective data as for example the existence of a larger and a smaller linguistic group in one and the same organizational entity. But if one considers the minority situations as communicative networks they are social phenomena and as such characterised by their cultural and historical development. A comparison on this level then needs a shared experience of crucial developments, as it is laid down in the collective memory of such groups. The shared historical expe-

rience produces a number of typical constellations, which allow to reduce the colourful complexity of the existing minority situations to stereotyped patterns (cf. Eichinger 1983).

2. Prerequisites of comparison

The communicative network of linguistic minorities which are of the European type is nevertheless characterized by a remarkable amount of diversity. This diversity of the phenomena can be reduced by a model summing up different phenomena which can be understood as different values of a variable. These variables represent relevant factors in a communicative network and range from the kind of languages used to the legal regulations to be found. Thereby the variety of phenomena is mapped onto a finite paradigm of relevant factors. In addition to this the values for the different factors are governed by the general character of the minority in question, which means that they are not independent of each other: only certain correlations occur in our cultural frame and certain choices rule out a lot of theoretically possible combinations. So even if many of the factors used for the description of these situations may claim to be of universal importance for the description of minority situations, cultural and historical restrictions shape the sociolinguistic characters we want to describe. In the following chapters of this paper the relevant factors for such a description will be discussed and an outline of salient constellations will be given. It is to be shown as well that such a description is suitable to model the change of minorities as complex systems.

The predominance of liberal democratic thinking which developed during the last decades has totally changed the situation of minorities, even if the identity of minorities to a large extent still mirrors the experiences within the discourse of the ethnic type of nation state.

3. Relevant factors

In this chapter the relevant factors for describing the minority type "linguistic minority in Western and Middle Europe" is to be sketched. Especially the correlation between the value the different variables assume and the cultural embedding shall be stressed.

3.1. Size

The factor of absolute and relative size of the linguistic minority at first sight looks rather absolute and not specific of a single culture. But contrary to this expectation it is strongly dependent on certain features reflecting the state of the society in question. In societies of the European type we usually find the command of the standard variety of the respective national language being of high importance (cf. Baum 1987). Concerning the medium, in which standard languages of this type are typically used, the communication within such societies is characterized by a preponderance of written communication (cf. Giesecke 1992: 61–66). European societies are marked by being a *Schriftkultur* 'written culture' and by *Standardsprachlichkeit* 'standard language predominance' (see Besch 1983: 983). The latter is to say that written forms of the language are no longer to be seen as secondary to the spoken varieties, but exercise themselves an influence on the spoken form. The changing relation between the written and spoken varieties must be seen in the light of most people being successfully schooled in the use of the standard language. The electronic media in addition to this produce types of texts which are ambiguous with respect to their structural and medial characteristics. The type of speaking exhibited there leads to an adaptation of the spoken language to written forms. This process corresponds to the growing range of the communicative network in which the individual in modernized societies acts.

With reference to this development it is possible to divide linguistic minorities into two groups, using communicative criteria. Small minorities are only able to meet parts of the communicative demands of modern societies within the range of the varieties of the minority language, large minorities are independent in this respect. With the real size of societies in Western and Middle Europe the borderline between small and large minorities may be drawn around 100,000 speakers. Somewhere at about 20,000 there seems to be another borderline. Groups smaller than that show communicative patterns which are only partly diglossic with an accordingly decreasing amount of bilingualism. There surely is a borderline at the top of the scale for minorities too: if groups taking their identity out of the use of their own specific language are bigger than that absolute size, size ceases to be a problem and a criterion for minoritarian status (cf. Coulmas 1992: 88).

Relative size of a minority has to be measured in comparison with the extent and the structural properties of the relevant political or social entity. "Relevant" in this context means being responsible for the rules by which the use of the different languages is governed. The amount in which the

minority language is represented is not simply parallel to the relative size of the group. Relatively small groups often do better than one would expect from their percentage of the whole population. It is easier to maintain coherence and unanimity in small groups, and it is comparatively easy for small groups with a strong identity to be the strongest minority in the process of democratic decision finding. The larger the group the more difficult it is to get a unanimous decision on a special problem: Sartori (1992: 224–227) in this context speaks of the factor of intensity. Nevertheless it is useful for the minority to be in an organisational unit where it represents a reasonable percentage of the population. As an example of this one may cite the case of the smaller language groups in Switzerland: the Italian speaking group just seems to be of a critical relative size, which makes it difficult to be seen as equal with the German and French speaking population (see Camartin 1982: 339–343), and Rhaeto-Romance has severe problems to be seen as a normal means of communication. This is true despite strong political and financial support for this language and is in part due to the small relative size of the group of its speakers (cf. Kraas 1993: 99/100).

3.2. Cultural and geographic embedding

Absolute and relative size obviously are not interesting as mathematically observable facts but as factors in a model of linguistic economy. Economy in this context does not just mean usability in the organization the minority belongs to but includes other aspects. First one has to look over the borders of the state the minority group is part of: one has to get a picture of the cultural und geographic embedding on a larger scale. A small minority area within a country may just be the margin of a much larger language area which by some historical incident has been organizationally cut off. Under these circumstances the economy question looks quite different from what the classification as a small minority would suggest. Supposing that there is the normal contact between democratically organized neighbouring states, the adjacency of the main language area could outweigh the factor of intrastate small size (cf. Schiffman 1993: 137). This case is not that unusual, as many minorities in Europe are border area minorities. The position at the borders of the national states implies a marginal status of such areas with regard to the centres of political organization and power. Though being a member of a marginal group nowadays – with growing federalism – may be less harsh a fate than it was, the collective memory of groups is still marked by this experience. The political and attitudinal marginality typi-

cally corresponds to geographic facts which can be interpreted with respect to their communicative consequences (cf. Kraas 1992: 182). It is not by accident that linguistic islands tend to survive in remote mountain valleys, remote areas, which can be covered totally by the minority and its type of communication. These facts as on the other hand the dissolving of minorities in other geographic circumstances can be related to the preferred type of settlement chosen by the minority. This factor obviously interferes with geography and economic structures. Minorities in the European context tend to live in economically weak regions. Furthermore, a rather traditional type of economy is prevalent there. As a consequence personal mobility for members of the minority is restricted, which on the other hand tightens the coherence of the minority group. As a negative consequence, however, the continuous and subtle adaptation of minoritarian communication and minority language to the needs of modernized societies is blocked: under these circumstances acts of language planning tend to be seen as unnatural. This effect appears with comparatively new attempts to create written standards for languages hitherto only spoken, as for example the dialects of Rhaeto-Romance or the Croatian spoken in the Austrian Burgenland.

This effect can be avoided by minorities which can rely on connections with the main area of their language. Examples of this case are the German speaking population in South Tyrol/Italy or – in principle – the Slovene minority in Carinthia/Austria, but also smaller and more isolated minorities as the remains of the medieval language islands in the Trentino/Italy, who have always taken advantage of their idiom by working as migrant traders in German speaking countries.

3.3. Political identity and representation

Political organization or representation of the minority are getting more and more relevant with the growing importance of democratic ways of decision making. Especially with the further development of the European Union it is important for an adequate representation of a group to try and turn the principle of subsidiarity to its advantage (see Gellert-Novak 1993). To reach this, a minority has to achieve a type of political and organizational structure within the state which is adapted to the needs of the minority. This concerns the regional adaptation of administrative districts and their provision with satisfactory competences. The German speaking minority in South Tyrol is an example of a minority which has been very successful in getting the political organization adapted to the wishes of the minority.

Leaving aside the problems implied by this solution (see Eichinger 1988: 186/187) it is obvious that not all groups have the opportunity to get as far as that. One specific reason for the success of the South Tyrolians lies in their compact group identity which is perhaps the most salient quality of this group. This strong group identity is – by means of the intensity-principle mentioned above – a prerequisite for getting an overproportional representation in political issues concerning the status of the minority. In the case of South Tyrol this identity forms its organisational body in a political party, the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP), which defines its goals through the ethnic interests of the minority. This party succeeded – on the one hand – in being accepted as the speaker of the group interests and – on the other hand – in representing itself in the democratic game of conflicting interest-groups as a partner who plays this game according to its rules. This approach which takes into account the change in the kind of political reasoning which is accepted nowadays and which nevertheless refers to the foundation of the collective memory of the group is without any doubt better adjusted to the modern type of political struggle than pure antimodern ethnic parties which try to negate the advances in the democratic organization in Western Europe.

3.4. History

It seems to be a trivial statement to say that the possibilities and limits of a minority group as we see them today are to a certain extent determined by their history. But it is not simply the facts of history which are laid down in the identity of a group. Certain phases and events in the history of a group are regarded as critical and therefore supply elements which the collective memory of the group is made of. History occurs as a more or less coherent set of stories made of historical material. These stories, of course, do not belong to the past but to the present and are as such often used as reasons for political action. This type of reasoning reduces by far the objectivity of so-called objective factors resulting from the history of a linguistic minority. Take for instance the concept of autochthony. This romantic idea, which identifies “older” with “better”, is nowadays used in a slightly different way: one argues about which period in the history of a state or region can be seen legitimately as source of the modern culture prevalent in this area. Finding an adequate place for this argument in the concept of liberal and democratic thinking is not easy (cf. Brunkhorst 1994; Taylor 1993). As far as Europe is concerned, pure anciennity, i.e. the search for primo-

geniture, does nor make much sense. The regions we talk about have been characterised by the cohabitation of different culturally defined groups and by intercultural and interlingual exchange as far as historical remembrance allows us to look back. So there is often no reasonable answer to the question who was there first, and even if there is such an answer its relevance for modern problems is rather doubtful (cf. Fraas 1992: 182). Of course this may look different within constellations where historical dislocation is an essential item in the collective memory of a group. The appearance of the ethnicity discussion in the USA has to be understood in this way as well as certain developments in societies which conceive themselves as postcolonial (e.g. Africa) or postimperialist (e.g. the former USSR). In single cases phenomena of this type are found in the Western European model too. For the Croatian minority in Burgenland immigration some 400 years ago is part of the collective memory (cf. Eichinger – Jodlbauer 1987: 139).

Other cases – the so called language islands – are even defined by the self-assessment to be dispersed from a community and region of origin (see Mattheier 1994: 334). In the average Western and Middle European type, however, historical reference is normally used as an argument between different groups about the validity of the stories which form the groups' collective memories. Each group in this constellation tries to get appropriate representation of their respective cultures and traditions. Speaking within the old context of nation states the consequences of such arguments are rather clear, in modern democratic societies one has several options. As far as democracy can be understood as a formal means of organizing the distribution of power, restricted only by the general rights of man, it is difficult to give a reason for which cultures should be officially represented in a society and which ones should not. Democratic societies have to tolerate and balance difference; the question is if there are any and if so, where there could be reasonable limits for differences still tolerable within one society. The widely accepted political model of liberal democracy offers a rather abstract frame for the solution of these problems: there is no good reason whithin this system to judge cultural expressions or traditions as far as the democratic consensus is not endangered (cf. Brunkhorst 1994; Beck 1994: 473/474). As can be seen by the examples of the Basks in Spain or by the fights between ethnic groups within the former eastern block, these abstract remarks about democratic values are not seen as adequat or helpful for dealing with such multilingual constellations by a number of minorities (cf. Haarmann 1993: 22–24). This point will not be discussed in detail here.

3.5. Legal status

The questions of the historical foundation of minority rights immediately lead to the question of laws and legal regulations in general by which the representation of minorities in a state and society is ruled.

Minority policy can be considered successful, if it reaches a compensatory shift of the principle of equality which is one of the prerequisites of a democratic procedure (see Sartori 1992: 340ff). All types of autonomy regulations on the political and the cultural levels can be described in this way. Representation in the bodies of political organisation is especially relevant. So the Danish minority in Schleswig-Holstein/Germany does not have to stick to the rule to have at least 5% of the vote to send a representative into the regional parliament. Equally important are the cultural and educational facilities and institutions, where the use and the teaching of the different languages is prescribed (cf. Ammon et alii (eds.) 1993). As in our society administrative and legal procedures have become so important, regulations for the use of languages are frequent in these domains too (cf. Schiffman 1993: 137 for an example). Regulations in the field of economy are rather powerful means of protecting minorities, as may be seen by the regulations for public employees in South Tyrol, which are known under the name of *Proporz* 'proportion'.

3.6. Status and use of languages

The central point of interest for the linguist who tries to study the communicative networks spread out by the minority are the structures and the use of the languages found in the situation. The typical minority language of the European type is not fully accommodated to the communicative demands imposed by modernized western societies. On the other hand this language or variety of a language gets its importance more from its symbolic than from its functional value. Where the symbolic value of a language for group coherence is very high, markers of exclusivity are brought forward which may even be detrimental to the functional value (cf. Markey 1987: 5/6). The changing functions of the varieties of German used in Switzerland, especially the rise of Swiss German [Schweizerdeutsch], can be interpreted this way, because there is a tendency to exchange intercommunication for a strong sign of identity (Watts 1988: 330; Koller 1992). This may be surprising, since Switzerland, as all the European societies we are talking about, is characterized by a pattern of language use which belongs to the standard-language type sketched above.

The range of varieties offered in such written cultures can usually be reached by the minority speakers only in a more complex way. Their spectrum of functional varieties is more likely than not put together by varieties taken from different languages. What was considered the most critical constellation from the view of 19th century national thinking, the contact of two fully functioning standardized languages, nowadays seems to pose relatively few problems. This contact pattern should lead to translation problems or a growing rate of bilingualism. In countries which try to control their multilingualism by means of the territoriality principle, as do Switzerland and Belgium, this constellation is dealt with as a kind of translation problem (cf. Schlöpfer 1982; Sonntag 1993). The burden of multilingualism is put on the shoulders of the individual who is forced to learn the language of the area he chooses to live in. This type of solution often gets into difficulties if the contacting languages are different as to function or esteem. This can be seen in Rhaeto-Romance, the written variety of which is rather unstable, to say the least. Analogous problems are produced by the change in the value of different spoken varieties of German used in Switzerland (Schiffman 1993: 126). Another type of problem is coming up when there is a prejudice gap between the cultures in question. From the German point of view slavic languages are usually considered inferior – which becomes apparent in the case of Slovene in Carinthia/Austria (cf. Boeckmann et alii 1988). In addition to the general European geography of prejudice (cf. Hinderling 1981: 210–216) ideological and political differences go into the same direction. The German speaking minorities along the western margin of the central German-speaking area surely continue the traditional higher esteem for the French language and tend to show some distance from the large and politically incriminated neighbour Germany (cf. Bollmann 1993; Ott – Philipp 1993).

In the average case the minority idiom is not able to fulfill all the demands of modern communication. Mostly there are problems with the written varieties; on the other hand one finds a high degree of variation within the spoken variety of the minority idiom. The fact that there is no general colloquial variety spoken by the majority of members shows that the minority language is only used in private domains of communication. Rhaeto-Romance and Ladinian are good examples in this respect. The variety of Croatian spoken in the Burgenland shows strong internal differentiation and a development rather different from central Croatian.

The features just mentioned are signs of lacking standardization and of a rural nature of the communicative networks, which leads to a depreciation of the respective languages in a world heading toward urban lifestyles

(Beck – Beck-Gernsheim 1994: 16). This depreciation has its reflexes in terminology, too. This is apparent in the French term of *patois*. The case of Alsatian, the traditional spoken language in Alsace/France, is an example of this language policy by terminology. This idiom is genetically describable as a dialect of German. When Alsace became part of France, the French language policy had an interest in showing that this spoken variety was an idiom of little value and had nothing to do with (standard) German. So Alsatian was called *patois* on the functional and *dialecte germanophone* on the genetic level (cf. Petit 1993). Because there seems to have been a certain revival of the Alsatian quarrel in the last few years one should note that the fight by terminology has worked the other way round as well. Even terms like *dachlose Außenmundart* 'roofless external dialect' show a certain ambiguity (cf. Harnisch 1993: 29). Though looking as if they described a historical continuum of genetic interrelated idioms, they are meant as functional terms as well. But in functional perspective *dachlose Außenmundarten* of course do have a roof, even if this roof of a standard variety comes from different genetic sources. As a consequence of this the term extinction or death of a *dachlose Außenmundart* does not adequately represent the functional and symbolic changes going on within the Alsatian speaking community. What is happening there is much more normal than this terminology suggests: in all parts of the German speaking area, where dialects are still used as languages of the most intimate communication the older – regionally and socially very restricted – forms give way to varieties which are regionally as well as socially of a wider circulation. This constellation is true for most of southern Germany and the dialects spoken there as well as for Alsace and Alsatian. In both cases the variety used for communication in the inner circle has been the local dialect. In both societies the increasingly individual structure of communicative networks which is no longer preformed by traditional family and cohabitation structures, forces the dialect speaker to communicate in a socially and linguistically more diverse field. As a consequence of this the regionally and socially most restricted dialects give way to varieties which level out the differences between the dialects. This not only makes it easier to understand each other but conforms better with a modern identity, which does not like to be restricted to the image of being a member of a group judged as marginal compared with the main trends within society (cf. Beck 1994: 472/473). It is especially the language or variety used in central cities, which spread over an area by this procedure. This change in language use which leads to structural changes as well can be simply understood as language change on the level of dialects, as long as all the varieties involved are genetically re-

lated to each other and if dialect is defined only as the language of the inner circle of communication. If historical, cultural and social factors are taken into account when defining "dialect" one would prefer to talk of the spreading of colloquial or standard-nearer varieties. This second way of speaking has the advantage, that it allows to talk about the sociolinguistically parallel case of Alsatian in an analogous way. The differences are easily seen: the choice of varieties of general communication in the case of Alsatian leads to structural trouble, because the colloquial varieties which are at the speakers' disposal, are varieties of French. This results in considerable difficulties even with the normally rather simple case of lexical borrowing with the aim of modernization of the language. Borrowing from another variety of the same language is by far less costly than it is when two structurally different languages are involved. Borrowing from another language very often leads to code-switching and in extreme cases to the use of idioms which look like mixed languages (Bechert – Wildgen 1991: 92–95). So the colloquialization in the context of the functioning standard language system of Western Europe leads to the use of a – regionally marked – variety of the national language. The historical aspects of the Alsatian problem are also compatible with this communicative explanation. To explain the status of Alsatian adequately one has to go back in time about 200 years, when Alsace became French. At this point of time the German speaking area had not quite reached the status that the standard language began to influence the spoken varieties. The use of German in Alsace therefore represents a status before this development. Compulsory education, which played an important role in the spreading of knowledge in the standard language, was introduced in Alsace when it already belonged to France. Seen from this point of view the time span from 1871 to 1918 really was an interim which could not basically change the relation between regional language and standard within the ideolect of the average speaker (cf. Schiffman 1993: 135/136). There is no lasting reaction to the spoken standard form of German. This has had the effect that the group of Alsatian-speaking people surely is not an ethnic minority. But at least an elite claims the Alsatian dialect to be a strong marker of regional identity, which should be respected in the relevant political and educational areas (cf. Hartweg 1991; Petit 1993; Weckmann 1991). These are the normal aims minorities want to achieve in democratic societies. Part of this aim is to take advantage of the genetic relation between Alsatian and High German. Therefore it is misleading to interpret the tendency to choose German as a foreign language and to use the own dialect as a help in learning it as an ethnic-national step back. As being part of a country like France or Germany is no longer understood as a national-ethnic question,

but more as a question of belonging to a democratic organization-type, reference made to historical or cultural binds over the borders are part of the specific identity of a group, which wants its identity to be respected within the democratic framework of the Western European states.

The Alsatian case shows as well that under modern circumstances the minority does not end where the minority language ends. But the existence of a minority language is vital for the definition of linguistic minorities as communicative networks the core of which is characterized by the use of a language different from that of the surrounding society. On the other hand one can see that we sociolinguistically have more to do with multilingual societies and language contact than with a more or less self-contained group of speakers of a different language. This is a consequence of the successful implantation of standardized national languages in the last one and a half centuries. It would be naive to treat minorities in a way as if this had never happened. The cruelties and social injustices against minority languages and their speakers which occurred in this process are of course not to be forgotten, they are to a large extent kept in the collective memories of minorities and majorities. For a synchronic analysis of today's status, however, the knowledge of national languages by practically all speakers of minority languages is a fact one cannot overlook.

3.7. Conclusion

Size, (social) geography and economy, political and legal organization, history and attitudinal structures and the structures and rules of the use of languages and their varieties, those are the categories which make up an adequate comparative description of minority constellations in Western and Middle Europe.¹

These categories are split up in paradigmatic clusters and are combined in a way that is preformed and restricted by the development of the society. The *tertium comparationis* is a pattern of these factors which sketches possible options in the paradigmatic variation and in the combination of certain values. By this concept it is avoided that there is aleatoric or endless variation, which is ruled out by the stereotyped combinations which are formed and restrained by the historical and cultural embedding. These restrictions draw the line against the abstraction of formal-universal definitions; the stereotypes draw the line as well between typological relevant and additional individual variation.

Taking into account the historical and cultural embedding leads to a higher grade of complexity, to a type of phenomena the development of which can be described by the cooperation of slight modifications of rather stable structures and sudden changes which put the old elements in a new (democratic) perspective and which seem to be in a complex relation with some of the small changes (cf. Cramer 1994: 246).

This model of change could explain why it looks on the surface as if language minorities of the European type acted within the nationally pre-formed frame of 19th century even today. In fact – as can be deduced from our remarks made to South Tyrol and Alsace – action and organization have changed without losing continuity, but they are now embedded in the democratic play of interests and the more individual planning of everyday lives. This offers the new opportunity for such marginal groups to be accepted as an integral part of the pluralistic society in which they can even count on certain concessions.

4. Stereotypes of European multilingualism

4.1. General remarks

Up to now we have tried to sketch linguistic minorities as a set of comparable items and as complex systems the development of which shows general trends but in detail is influenced by a lot of cultural elements. The cultural embedding allows us to list a series of stereotyped images of minority-majority-constellations, which allow a holistic way of subdividing the type "European linguistic minority". Concerning our variables the values taken in these cases and their combination give salient pictures. In the following just two extremes of this series of sociolinguistic characters are to be outlined.

4.2. Small and by itself

Minorities of this type gather characteristics which very strongly signal marginality. They are small minorities, they live at the margin of the country they belong to, in areas moreover which do not lie on the way in any other respect. This prototypically small group of speakers uses a language which you may call a small language for various reasons. Firstly it is a

lesser used language in a literal sense: on the one hand there are fewer and fewer people who use it regularly and for their normal communicative purposes, on the other hand it does not offer too many functional possibilities. There is a relatively far genetic distance between the minority idiom and the surrounding languages and a relatively high degree of inhomogeneity within the minority language. The minority language is in not very high esteem with neighbouring groups, in many a case not even with its speakers themselves. The area the minority lives in not only lies off the centres of the country it belongs to, but there are barely urban centres of the minority. Religious delimitation may add to the minority status, the conscience of being a member of a minority is a widespread mark of identity, political action is taken by a small educational elite – if at all. The economy reflects the rural structure, tourism which refers to the folkloric appeal of the minority may be added. Qualified work in other than the traditional jobs and training for such jobs force people to leave the region and language of the group. School education takes place in an educational system strongly oriented toward the acquisition and use of the national language. As an effect of this practically all speakers of the minority idiom are bilingual, there is a situation of diglossia. Legal regulations concerning the language are rudimentary. The minority language is a predominantly spoken language; the written form – if there is one – is more used in print than in writing. The historical development and the attitudinal structure are not easily reduced to one sentence but there is a certain tendency to stress the singularity of the own situation.

Minorities like the speakers of Frisian in Germany or of Croatian in Austria come very close to this picture, in a purely synchronic view this is true for the speakers of Sorbian as well (cf. Norberg 1994).

4.3. Large and with each other

In contrast to what we described before we now want to discuss a totally different type of minority. We are talking about linguistic minorities which have succeeded in institutionalizing themselves as an integral part of a federative structure. These groups are winners of the general tendency in modern European societies, by which formerly marginal groups get closer to the center of power (Elias 1990: 34). Power was gained by using the changing rules within the nation state which have led to a federative distribution of power. To defend its own position in this game of interests a group has to have a certain size and it is very useful if it lives in an area

and type of settlement which gives a good opportunity for the regionalizing of power. Regionalizing of power asks for an independent infrastructure and the linguistic and personal means to keep it running. The elite of the minority group must be able to interconnect the contacting cultures, which means they have to represent a very high status of bilingualism, offering a set of functional varieties in both languages. For this purpose it is very helpful if the minority language is part of a standard-language-community as well. This connection eases practical as well as attitudinal problems. Normally the country the minority lives in and the countries where this minority language is the standard language should have normal and friendly relations. Regionalizing of power produces ample legal regulations. As far as ethnic arguments are used as reasons for the process of regionalizing political problems with other groups, especially with members of the majority, are likely to arise. If the minority group is economically successful, autonomy is easier to reach. The high intensity of group coherence in these cases may be used as a means of producing political pressure, which is shown by measures to make admission to the group difficult.

Examples of this end of the scale may be found in South Tyrol but also with the Flemish minority in Belgium or even the German speaking part of Switzerland – even if there are other aspects which make it difficult to see this group as a minority.

5. Outlook

Our short overview should have shown that European minorities have changed their status profoundly with the processes of modernization and democratization, which have been going on for the last few decades. If you take central factors which are important in all instances of communicative networks and take into account which options are open at all for societies of the European type you get a description which allows comparison on a relevant level. Starting from such a description which leads to some prototypical constellations one could try and discuss how multilingualism should be dealt with in democratic societies and where to place arguments of ethnicity in such a context (cf. Goebel 1990: 46).

Note

- 1 There are some features which could be put together as merely cultural and religious factors (cf. Eichinger 1988: 187). With respect to modernization kept in focus here they are either less important or can be subsumed under the political (e.g. cultural associations), historical (religion) or the linguistic (use of media; theatre etc.) factors.

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